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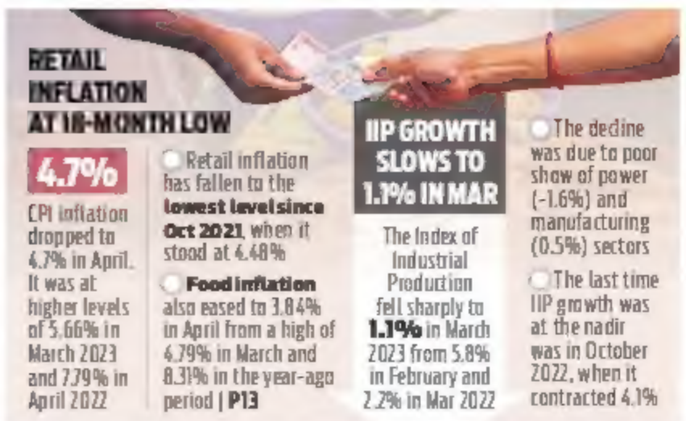
RETAIL INFLATION AT 18-MONTH LOW
4.7%
CPI inflation dropped to 4.7% in April. It was at higher levels of 5.66% in March 2023 and 7.79% in April 2022
Retail inflation has fallen to the lowest level since Oct 2021, when it stood at 4.48%
Food inflation also eased to 3.84% in April from a high of 4.79% in March and 8.31% in the year-ago period | P13
IIP GROWTH SLOWS TO 1.1% IN MAR
The Index of Industrial Production fell sharply to 1.1% in March 2023 from 5.8% in February and 2.2% in Mar 2022
The decline was due to poor show of power (-1.6%) and manufacturing (0.5%) sectors
The last time IIP growth was at the nadir was in October 2022, when it contracted 4.1%

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Lalu dials Gowda, seeks BJP ouster

SHAHID FARIDI @ New Delhi

RJD SUPREMO and former Bihar chief minister Lalu Yadav has spoken to former prime minister and Janata Dal (Secular) chief HD Deve Gowda, seeking his help to keep the BJP out in the event of a hung Assembly in Karnataka. The counting of votes is scheduled for Saturday.

According to sources, Lalu told Gowda that the result of Karnataka has the potential to change the mood of the nation in the run-up to 2024 and give a boost to the unity moves among the opposition parties. He wanted Karnataka to send a message that the opposition can come together to keep the BJP out.

In another development, Congress general secretary KC Venugopal Friday attended a meeting of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence at Kochi where Bahujan Samaj Party MP Kunwar Danish Ali was also present as a member of the committee. Venugopal and Ali were the two signatories of the terms of understanding between Congress and JDS when the two parties formed a coalition government in Karnataka after the last Assembly election. Ali was then a senior general secretary of the JDS and still enjoys close personal rapport with Deve Gowda. According to sources, it was not a coincidence that the two spent a day together in the southern state on a crucial day.

Sources said that PM Narendra Modi's high-pitch campaign and prediction of a hung Assembly by some pollsters has forced the opposition parties to open behind-the-scenes channels to work out an understanding. **P5**

It's day of judgment for Cong, BJP & JDS

All eyes on K'taka poll verdict; clear picture by 2 pm

RAMU PATIL @ Bengaluru

BJP and Congress on Friday intensified their back-end planning to deal with various scenarios that could emerge after the announcement of results of Assembly elections on Saturday.

Counting of votes will begin at 8 am in 36 centres across Karnataka. Trends will start emerging around noon, while a clear picture will be out by 2 pm.

While government formation efforts will begin soon after results are announced, leaders of the two parties have begun chalking out strategies to deal with outcomes such as a hung Assembly and marginally falling short of the magic figure of 113 seats in the 224-member House.

The two parties have begun preparing 'Plan B' in case they fail short of 113 seats to prevent each other from gaining ground. JDS, on its part, has adopted a 'wait-and-watch' strategy. It is likely to play a crucial role in government formation in case of a fractured verdict.

Congress, which ran a sustained campaign highlighting its poll guarantees and the state government's failures, is confident of winning a clear majority. The exit polls, which gave the party an edge over others, have boosted the morale of its leaders and workers across the state.

KPCC president DK Shivakumar, a strong contender for the CM's post if Congress wins a clear mandate, and former DCM G Parameshwar held discussions with AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge in Bengaluru. Having learnt a lesson from the previous experience, the party has asked its winners to rush to Bengaluru soon after the results are declared. They are likely to be moved to a resort to keep them out of reach of BJP's possible efforts to poach them. **P5**

KARNATAKA POLLS 2023 DECIDE

3 SCENARIOS

1. Cong or BJP gets simple majority and forms govt
2. No party gets clear majority. Congress and BJP and try to woo Independents
3. No party comes close to simple majority of 113 seats. JD(S) plays key role in govt formation

WHO'S DOING WHAT

CONGRESS
- Likely to move its MLAs to a resort to prevent poaching
- Projecting AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge as chief minister
- Reaching out to the Independents who are likely to win
- Reach out to Veerashaiva Lingayat MLAs in other parties through community heads

BJP
- Hoping for surprise factors to get clear majority
- Confident of getting at least 107; hoping to manage the rest with help of Independents and small parties
- Yediyurappa discusses with senior leaders booth reports and party strategy

JD(S)
- Wait-and-watch strategy
- Kumaraswamy say party is open to alliance. But party non-committal to both BJP and Cong
- Deve Gowda to speak to winning candidates so that they aren't poached
- Opinion of party workers to be heard and respected before announcing pact

Cash for votes? Biz up in C'durga, D'gere after polling

G SUBHASH CHANDRA @ Chitradurga/Davanagere

SHOPS selling home appliances, electronic gadgets, jewellery and sarees made brisk business in cities and towns across Chitradurga and Davanagere districts on Thursday and Friday with a large number of women thronging them.

The reason for this unusual rush is said to be the "handsome" payment made to them by political parties for their votes.

Many women were seen at pawnbrokers' shops busy getting back their pledged gold jewelry. Such shops on Old Post Office Road, Lakshmi Bazaar in Chitradurga city, Chamarajpet, and Church Street in Davanagere were crowded.

A pawnbroker on Old Post Office Road said he had to open three more counters at his shop to facilitate repayment of "gold loans". "We had to keep our shop open till 9 pm," he added. **P4**

CBSE results out: Bengaluru stands 2nd

BENGALURU PASS PERCENTAGE

99.18% (Class 10) | **98.64%** (Class 12)

Students celebrate after CBSE results were announced, at Rajajinagar in Bengaluru on Friday | MAHARAJA GADEKAL

DONNA EVA @ Bengaluru

BENGALURU emerged as the second highest scoring city and Karnataka the third highest state in the country in Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) examinations. CBSE released the results of Classes 10 and 12 examinations on Friday.

Bengaluru recorded a pass percentage of 99.18 in Class 10 and 98.64 in Class 12 examinations, behind Thiruvananthapuram. Karnataka recorded a pass percentage of 98.64, behind Kerala and Mizoram, which registered 99.91 and 99.49, respectively.

This year, the board refused to release the merit list stating that it might lead to unhealthy competition among students.

Compared to 2021-22, the pass percentage of students of Classes 10 and 12 decreased by 1.28 and 5.38, respectively. Compared to 2019-20 (pre-Covid period), the pass percentage increased by 2.02 and 3.93, respectively.

Though the board has not announced the toppers' list, many students from across the state scored high marks, including from Bengaluru, Belagavi and Shivamogga districts. Many shared their marks on social media. CBSE 2024 exams will commence from February 15.

Aryan Dalmia, who topped Ekya School, BTM Layout, in Class 12 examination, owed his success to his teachers. **P3, P9**

DOUBLE SHOCK

Power tariff up by 70 paise per unit

BOSKY KHANNA @ Bengaluru

KARNATAKA Electricity Regulatory Commission (KERC) on Friday announced a hike in power tariff by 70 paise per unit with effect from April 1, 2023. The hike was announced on KERC's website on Friday evening. An official from the Energy Department said the tariff hike is almost double compared to last year's.

"Last year, the hike was 35p, a 4.75% increase. But this year, KERC hiked it by 70p, a 8.31% increase. With this revision, now a domestic consumer will have to pay ₹4.15/unit if consumption is between 0 and 100 units, ₹7 between 100 and 150 units and ₹7 above 150 units. KERC removed the three slab charges method from the billing table," the official said. **P5**

HC OKs carbon dating of Gyanvapi 'Shivling'

NAMITA BAJPAI @ Lucknow

THE Allahabad High Court on Friday set aside the Varanasi district court's October 2022 order rejecting a plea for carbon dating of the purported Shivling in the Gyanvapi mosque located next to the Kashi Vishwanath temple in Varanasi and ordered the age of the structure be determined using modern technology.

The high court directed the Varanasi district judge to proceed, in accordance with law, on the application by the Hindu worshippers for conducting a scientific probe of the 'Shivling' to determine its age.

The HC also ordered that no harm should be done to the Shivling-like structure, which the mosque management claims is part of a fountain where ablutions are performed before prayers.

The HC had sought inputs from Kanpur and Roorkee IITs and the Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeobotany in Lucknow. Sources said their report recommended proxy dating to determine the age of the structure. The court considered the suggestions of Prof Javed Malik of Department of Earth Sciences, IIT Kanpur, who suggested a detailed subsurface survey using ground penetrating radar to understand the buried material and structure.

Imran Khan gets 2-week protective bail

YESHI SELI @ New Delhi

A day after the Pakistan Supreme Court ruled that former prime minister Imran Khan's arrest was illegal, the Islamabad High Court on Friday granted the cricketer-turned-politician protective bail for two weeks in the Al Qadir Trust corruption case. The HC also barred authorities from arresting Khan till Monday in any fresh case registered against him.

The high court will decide whether to cancel or extend Khan's bail in the next hearing.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday lamented that the judiciary is giving 'privileged treatment' to Khan, who he claimed was promoting hatred and intolerance. **FULL COVERAGE: P12**

EXPRESS READ

SC stays promotion of 68 Guj judicial officers

The Supreme Court on Friday stayed the promotion of 68 Gujarat lower judicial officers, including Surat CJM who had convicted Rahul Gandhi | **P10**

160 pedestrians died in B'luru in 2021: NCRB

In Bengaluru, 576 pedestrians were injured and 160 died in 2021, showed a recent NCRB report while across Karnataka, 1,631 pedestrians died | **P3**

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